

# THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

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## FREEDOM IN PENANCE

THE EDITOR

TO continue and to conclude the theme we have been developing in the two preceding issues of *THE LIFE* we would wish to insist that true Christian penance and asceticism is based not on a rejection or despising of things natural and human but on a true detachment from every creature. The Christian should only reject evil, for all good is in some way from God: and the only complete evil is sin which is to be set on one side, trampled under foot, rejected by true penance. The penance that we do is designed to abolish the evil of sin and its effects. The creatures of God, from our Lord's humanity and our Blessed Lady down to the tiniest atom of matter, have proceeded from the Source of all good and retain a share in that goodness so long as they continue to exist. Such things are not to be rejected.

By detachment, however, the Christian frees himself from the trammels of all these good things. He may only be completely attached to God, and to the godly element in the things God has made. This applies to the whole run of creation. It is possible, for example, to become attached to our Lady on the purely human level and so to be drawn into superstition. It is often this that the non-Catholic suspects, as a rule quite erroneously, in Catholic devotion to the Mother of God—the unreal sentiment, the magical trust in mere repetition of prayers, the attempt to clothe her with every possible quality, even those, such as the priesthood, which the Church has declared incompatible with her nature. The Christian must be detached from his Rosary and his Novenas, from his Fatima shrines and his pictures of our Lady of Good Counsel, which is to say that he may not be attached to these things. He is attached to our Lady because she is the Mother of God and has the godly element to the full—'full of grace'. If need be he can discover her and obtain her intercession without the use of his beads; so that there may be occasions when the principle of Christian penance must be employed even in such matters. The same penance is obviously demanded in the sphere of the liturgy, with its engaging delights for ear and eye and even for the nose as the trained Gregorian choir chants its Easter Alleluia's round the



newly lit Paschal Candle at midnight with the rising cloud of incense catching its yellow rays. Here, even when the Lenten season of penance has just ceased, detachment must not be foregone—the choir may sing out of tune but the Christian should not be deflected from his joy in the rising of the Sun of Justice. Again in the greatest gift in the natural order, that of human friendship, the principle of detachment must be there to purify the union of two human persons and keep their affection within the wider love of the Blessed Trinity. In these more perfect goods of nature the possibility of attachment is far greater, the bonds of nature stronger and more all-embracing, so that Christian penance has to play a more powerful if more subtle part therein.

In other words the principle of penance is that of freedom, not the merely negative technique of non-attachment which seems to have been preached by some of the more mystically-minded of modern writers, but the exercise of free will liberated from the slavery of being determined and led by the lesser-goods of creation. Even in a true human love or in the divine liturgy a man may be led by the nose and be in fact unable to choose for himself.

Penance or mortification, as we have seen, is essentially an exercise of the will, freely choosing to undergo the necessities of life and even of death as imposed by the will of God, following the obedience of Christ to the Cross. This penitential exercise brings with it a true freedom in which the Christian's will may co-operate to the full with divine grace. Thus the unmortified man who follows the whims of his senses becomes encaged by his pain if he is struck down by some dreaded disease like cancer. Previously bound a slave by the things of this world which he enjoys, he is now equally a slave to the discomfort or agony that he suffers. By the exercise of penance the true Christian can still stand outside his pain and view it against the wider canvas of God's designing, seeing in it a way of making amends for his sin and of uniting in the act of universal redemption on Calvary. He is free because he has freely chosen to suffer whatever God should have willed for him.

Thus Christian penance does not aim simply at liberating a man by non-attachment so that he may remain stoically calm and content even in adversity. That has been called a sort of 'athlete's penance'—for the athlete denies himself many legitimate pleasures of food or drink or recreation in order that he may become a

greater master of himself in the matter of muscle and agility. But a man who practises a type of non-attachment simply that he may attain a sort of human freedom from his circumstances, an independence in the midst of a determined world, is likely to be the more strongly attached to himself, the centre of his own little world. True Christian penance prepares a man to choose death for himself, according as God has decreed it, the smashing of his own centre—that the one Centre of all may draw him into its orbit, that life may the more abound. He becomes untrammelled even by the strongest bonds of all, his self-love and ambition for human perfection. And this can only be understood and undertaken when a man has recognized the evil of sin and its consequent devastation as it divides creation up into a myriad conflicting little centres of human wills. True freedom can thus only be gained by the apparent abandonment of human free will to the enveloping choice of God, drawing all things to himself.

In this way it will be seen that the first essential in the matter of Christian penance is not to look around for what are known as 'voluntary mortifications'. People who are anxious to 'do penance' often seek about for somewhat romantic methods and instruments, eating bitter herbs, sleeping on the floor, wearing chains and hair shirts. These things certainly belong to the exercise of free will, but quite often they do not effect the liberation that penance should achieve. Being subject to the free choice of the individual, and yet in themselves usually material things, they can enslave their devotees as strongly as the pleasurable goods of the senses. The mortifications which are truly liberating are those which God chooses, and it is these that 'voluntary mortifications' often seek to evade. A person who has a sense of guilt at his frequent failures to keep his temper and his constant uncharitable criticisms may decide to mortify himself with a self-imposed fast. And this may only be an attempt to escape from his circumstances if all the time the neighbour or relative who is the source of his annoyance, irritation and uncharity is not accepted as the cross which God is imposing, the mortification which offers a true liberation in the voluntary acceptance of what is perhaps in itself inescapable. The fast will do no good until the Christian has decided to feast his impossible relative every day that he has to share his roof with him. Such mortifications which God lays on a Christian are the true penances and lead to true freedom. The



'voluntary mortifications' are little more than expressions of willingness to bear the cross which the Lord has decreed. And even so any important voluntary mortification should only be undertaken with some sort of permission or authorization from confessor or director in order to remove it from the exclusive sphere of personal choice and submit it to the authority of the will of God.

It may be noted in this connection that often the very situations which are causing us most frequently to sin are those in which our spiritual progress is most assured. The difficult situation which makes a man unhappy, restive, critical and rebellious is a sacramental, an outward sign of special graces offered to him by God who does not tempt him beyond his strength nor put him into a position in which he has not the divine power of grace at hand to support him. Any attempt at escape will make the occasion of grace, of special, perhaps heroic, charity and fortitude, an occasion of sin.

Quite simply, therefore, Christian penance is essentially the honest and deliberate attempt to co-operate with the will of God in the effects in particular of the sins of mankind. This was the way of the Cross for Christ and is the way of the cross for the Christian of all times.

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## THE FLIGHT FROM GOD

### A Biblical Meditation

E. J. TINSLEY

THE subject of the Bible as a whole is the unique divine drama of the creation, fall, redemption and restoration of man, and in this drama God himself plays the central role as author, actor and producer. The drama is a real one, no mere puppet show manipulated by the author, and this means that all those engaged in it have the freedom to tamper with the author's intentions in the interests of their own vanity and pride. They can seek to be masters of the plot rather than servants of it. But this drama is such that no actor in it can ultimately frustrate the author's intentions. They can, for example, ignore the part which he is playing in his own works, but they cannot ultimately suppress it. Even when the play seems to be getting hopelessly out of hand, the author-producer has the will and the power to engage the most unruly sub-plot for his main design, which remains always evident in each new situation. For this is a living drama in which all men are assigned parts, and even those who refuse to play or deny their assignments are used by the author to bring the drama to its fruition.

It is in some such way that the Hebrews regarded history, and their language, not really equipped to handle logical or philosophical speculation, was admirably suited for poetic drama, with its concrete realistic images never far removed from the actual and the visible. The divine activity in history throws up in the course of its interpretation its own characteristic images, and these become part of the revelation. These images can never be adequately translated, nor, we may perhaps add, can they be 'demythologised', but are inseparable from the drama itself, only to be understood when they are acted upon in a man's consent to play his proper part in the play.

As an example of what is meant by this, let us take some of the Biblical images which cluster round the themes of sin and redemption. Here, characteristically, there is no great speculation about the origin of sin, nor any precise analysis of the nature of redemption, such as would be found in a Greek writer on the same



themes. Instead the meaning of sin and redemption is indicated in certain concrete images, to which the writers return again and again as irreducible constants in the vocabulary of the drama which is human history, these images becoming themselves part of the biblical history.

Sin, for the men of the Old Testament, is essentially a wandering off the right way set before them by the Lord in Torah. This is no casual innocuous straying from the right course, but a deliberate attempt to escape from it, to seek to assert that the only right way is the one which a man is engaged in pursuing for himself. Hence one characteristic Old Testament image round which the Hebrew consciousness of sin gathers is the *Flight from God*.

In Genesis 3 there is the contrast between the freedom and unselfconsciousness of man when he is at peace with God, his fellowmen and the world, and the inhibiting selfconsciousness of man when he seeks to flee from the Presence:

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the cool of the day: and the man and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.—Genesis 3, 8-10 (R.V.)

That man is a fallen creature, a sinner, means, then, that he seeks to flee from the presence of God, to hide himself, believing that such a flight is an ultimate possibility. Man's flight from God is on. Cain's sin, all sin, means that a man becomes a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth, not at home in the drama in which he must participate:

Behold thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the ground, and from thy face shall I be hid, and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth. . . . And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.—Genesis 4, 14, 16 (R.V.)

Mankind, as the momentum of the flight from God increases, disperses in a scattered and disunited stampede, but seeks, from time to time, the seeming security and unity of city life, because here the flight is so efficiently organized as to seem permanent and the only reality:

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose tops may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the

Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded, and the Lord said, Behold they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is what they begin to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore was the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them upon the face of all the earth.—Genesis 11, 4-9 (R.V.).

The unity of man is not to be built up from below, Babel fashion, but received from above, because the unity of men with one another issues from their union with God, the possibility of which turns on Redemption from the flight. In fact, in the Old Testament, the judgment of God falls on all man-made attempts to construct a unity whilst still maintaining the flight, and on all attempts of man to do his own ingathering as if the harvest were his. The judgment of God falls because man's attempt to by-pass the way of God to unity can only result in the exercise of tyrannical force exulting in its own accomplishments:

Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the King of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he hath said, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom: for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the peoples, and have robbed their treasures, and I have brought down as a valiant man them that sit on thrones: and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the peoples, and as one gathereth eggs that are forsaken, have I gathered all the earth.—Isaiah 10, 12-14 (R.V.).

Man in the impetus and hysteria of the flight assumes that he is now his own best guide; it is from men who have paused or turned round ('repented') in the flight that the cry comes:

O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.—Jeremiah 10, 23 (R.V.).

A man's goings are of the Lord;

How then can man understand his way?—Proverbs 20, 24 (R.V.).



A man's heart deviseth his way;

But the Lord directeth his steps.—Proverbs 16, 9 (R.V.).

As the flight proceeds man finds it necessary to unburden himself of the things which hinder the running, and the chief of these is truth, a consideration of which makes a man pause and become less certain about the slogans posted up along the way of the flight:

Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein doth not know peace. . . . And judgment is turned away backward, and righteousness standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and uprightness cannot enter.—Isaiah 59, 7-8, 14 (R.V.).

But although men seek to flee from God, God is, in fact, not only the One from whom they attempt to flee, but the One who pursues after them. Hence the constant biblical summons to repentance, to turn round or back in the flight and face the Divine Pursuer. The flight does not mean that the divine drama has got out of hand; men begin to see that it is part of the main plot:

Whither shall I go from thy spirit?

Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

If I ascend up into heaven thou art there:

If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there.

If I take the wings of the morning,

And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

Even there shall thy hand lead me,

And thy right hand shall hold me.—Psalm 139, 7-10 (R.V.).

Though they dig into hell, thence shall my hand take them; and though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down. And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out.—Amos 9, 2-3 (R.V.).

God as the Pursuer has the power to go on ahead of the stampede and turn to face it, issuing in the prophets the summons to repent:

Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have sent unto you my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: yet they

hearkened not unto me nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff: they did worse than their fathers.—Jeremiah 7, 25-26 (R.V.).

God pursues fleeing humanity not merely as vengeful Judge but as merciful Redeemer, and so now the image of God as Pursuer grows out into that of God the Ingatherer of his people:

The Lord thy God . . . will have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the peoples, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine outcasts be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: and the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.—Deuteronomy 30, 3-5 (R.V.).

I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and multiply. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be lacking, saith the Lord.—Jeremiah 23, 3-4 (R.V.).

The ingathering is to be one of the signs of the presence of the messianic times, and in the Book of Isaiah the 'Servant' is to be the means whereby God will gather together his Israel. And so the Flight in Old Testament thought is turned into an Exodus, a guided procession, a matter now, not of fleeing from, but of following after; the Flight is turned through the redeeming action of God into a liberation. There comes in now the perspective of a goal for the journey, a promised land. There is now no longer aimless flight for all, but a triumphal march for those who will follow. 'Sing', then, 'to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously':

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! The voice of thy watchmen! they lift up the voice, together do they sing; for they shall see, eye to eye, when the Lord returneth to Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.



The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord. For ye shall not go out in haste, neither shall ye go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel shall be your rearward.—Isaiah 52, 7-12 (R.V.).

In the New Testament the New Exodus is accomplished, once and for all, in our Lord Jesus Christ, who, as Israel's Ingatherer through the act of Redemption, takes Israel back with him along the road to the Father: 'He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.' The Way of Israel in Exodus to the Promised Land is walked along, in consummate obedience, by the Son of Man, who is himself now the Way, the Truth and the Life, and those who follow him are those of 'The Way'. 'He goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice' (John 10, 4. R.V.) He is himself the Way and the Guide along the Way, and Christians are now able to run with joy the race that is set before them 'along the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh' (Hebrews 10, 20. R.V.).

There is now full realization that God is not only he from whom men seek to flee, but also, in reality, through his merciful Redemption, he to whom they are in fact fleeing. God is not only pursuing after his fleeing humanity, but allows himself to be trodden down in the stampede (in the Crucifixion of the Son he sends), and yet stands finally in the path of all men. Those who know that they are now part of a guided Exodus press on with confidence and joy; those who think that the flight is still only and ever a flight find themselves running up against that which they believed to be ever behind them. In the beginning God, and in the end God. The judgment theme sets before us the image of God drawing humanity unto himself as the inevitable and inescapable Alpha and Omega:

And he said to me, These are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.—Apocalypse 7, 14-17 (R.V.)



## SERMON FOR OUR LADY'S BIRTHDAY

ST BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

*Translated by a Monk of Mt St Bernard's Abbey*

MARY, virgin yet a mother. Here on earth we can only hold her memory sacred while heaven rejoices at her presence. And in the same way heaven is the true home of every good which we on earth can only imagine to ourselves, we, who have to be content with a mere foretaste of that bliss which will satisfy every desire. In heaven there is true life, here life only in name. Lord, you endure for ever, your name is not forgotten as generation follows generation to the grave—generations of men, not angels, So if we want to know why a name and a memory is all we have while the reality is present in heaven, we turn to the Gospel where our Lord says: 'This, then, is to be your prayer: Our Father who *art* in heaven, hallowed be thy *name*'. Faith speaks here, reminding us in the very first words that we are the adopted children of God, and that our life on earth is only a pilgrimage. Realizing then, that as long as we are not in heaven we are still on our way to God, we groan in our hearts, waiting to be adopted into the family of God and brought into the presence of the Father. Jeremias, too, says expressly of Christ, 'Christ our Lord goes before us as a mighty spirit, and under his shadow we shall live among heathen folk', for in the bliss of heaven we shall not live under his shadow but in the splendour of his glory: surrounded by the splendour of the saints the Father himself says: 'You are my Son born before the day-star rises'.



But, as we know, Mary did not give birth to this same Son surrounded by the splendour of the saints: she brought him forth amid the shades of this world, overshadowed, but by the power of the Most High. Similarly the Church militant—not yet triumphant and resplendent in heaven but still on its earthly pilgrimage—aptly takes to herself the words: 'I rested under the cool shade of him for whom my heart longs, and his fruit was sweet in my mouth'. She had asked to be shown the pasture ground of the beloved under the noonday heat, but her request was not granted in full and for the time being she was given shade instead of the noonday sun, a mere taste of food that did not satisfy her hunger. She wished to rest in him, not just in the protection of his shadow, and sought not the shade but the brilliance of the noonday sun, the dazzling splendour of him who is the light of true light. 'And his fruit was sweet in my mouth', she cries out—sweet to the taste. How long must I be content merely to taste and not possess the graciousness of the Lord? He is indeed pleasing to the taste, sweet to the palate of the soul, and even for this foretaste the bride may well break out into songs of praise and thanksgiving.

Not in this life, then, shall we be told, 'Eat your fill, lovers; drink, dearly beloved, and drink deep.' The saints shall keep festive holiday, but in God's presence, and it is only when God's glory dawns that the psalmist will be fully content. Christ himself said to his apostles, 'You are the men who have kept to my side in my hours of trial: and, as my Father has allotted a kingdom to me, so I allot to you a place to eat and drink at my table'. 'Where shall this be?' we ask. 'In my kingdom.'

Blessed, then, is the man who feasts in the kingdom of God, and in the meantime, dear Lord, 'hallowed be thy name' that is now dwelling in the hearts of all those who call upon it with confidence. 'Thy kingdom come'—let the fulfilment of all truth come and sweep away our imperfect glimpses of it. St Paul tells us: 'You have a harvest in your sanctification, and your reward is eternal life': life everlasting, an unfailing spring watering the whole of paradise, a stream bordered with gardens, giving abundance of water to all as it comes tumbling down from the heights of Lebanon; it is that deeply flowing river that enriches the city of God.

This fountain of living water is Christ himself. Christ is

your life, and when he is made manifest, you too will be made manifest in glory with him. He it was who dispossessed himself and gave himself to us to be our justification, our sanctification and our atonement, though not as yet showing us clearly that he is our life, glory and eternal happiness as well. The waters of this stream have reached even us, and, though strangers may not drink of them, they flow through the public streets, carried down from heaven as it were by an aqueduct which gives to our parched and withered souls some few drops of grace. It is not indeed the source of grace, but is full of grace, giving more to one, less to another, so that out of its abundance all receive some measure of that fulness which it alone enjoys.

You have already realized, I am sure, whom I mean, who it is that has been able to receive these unfailing waters at their very source in the Father's heart and has passed them on to us, not in their full flood-tide, but to each in his own measure. You know who was found worthy of the greeting, 'Hail full of grace', and we stand amazed to see this mighty channel of all graces formed out of poor human nature. The head of this our aqueduct is not content with reaching up into heaven like Jacob's ladder, but pierces the heavens themselves, and reaches up to the very source of those living waters that are beyond the heavens. Solomon, dismayed at the greatness of the task, cried out as if in despair, 'Who shall find a valiant woman?' and the human race went without these heavenly graces for so long a time precisely because the gulf between God and man was not yet bridged in this way. Nor shall we be surprised that the period of waiting was so long if we remember how many years that just man Noe worked at building the ark, in which a few souls, eight in all, found refuge, and, what is more, for only a brief space of time.

The gulf to be bridged was a mighty one, but Mary's burning desires, wholehearted devotion, and utterly selfless prayer reached up to the source of all grace; the prayer of a just man pierces the clouds, and Mary, from whom arose the Sun of Justice, can claim that title before all other creatures. She made her way into the presence of that unapproachable majesty by knocking, asking, searching; at last she found what she sought: 'You have found favour in the sight of God', she heard the angel say. But if she is already full of grace, how can she find still more favour?



She could seek such a gift, and was worthy to find it because her own fulness was not enough for her; she was not content with merely her own sanctification, but begged a superabundance of grace to save all men, since 'they who drink of these waters shall thirst for more'. That is why the angel said: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you'—yes, and pour out upon you his precious graces in such profusion that their gracious influence is spread abroad on every side. And that is just what happens, as we who are strengthened and refreshed by it can testify. Her very name spoken soothes the heart like the flow of oil, and generation after generation holds her memory sacred. Nor is her store of grace wasted in being spread abroad, for it attracts virgin souls to the love of her Son; the perfume, running down from the head, makes both beard and tunic fragrant.

How deep are God's plans, how full of wisdom and loving-kindness! All the ground is to receive heaven's dew, but first he saturates the fleece alone. When he wished to redeem the whole human race he put in Mary the price for the whole work. Why? Perhaps so that Eve should find pardon through her daughter, and man's accusing finger should be pointed at women no more. Adam can no longer say to God, 'The woman you gave me to be my companion, she it was that offered me fruit from the forbidden tree', but rather 'The woman you gave me has given me heavenly food to eat'. This is God's plan, and already we see his lovingkindness; perhaps there is more to it, a fuller meaning yet to be discovered. It is true as far as it goes, but I feel it does not satisfy you: it is only milk fit for babes; if we would have butter we must labour a little longer.

With what whole-hearted devotion, then, did God wish us to honour Mary when he adorned her with the fulness of every heavenly gift, so that if there is in us a spark of hope, any stirring of grace or promise of salvation, we can be sure that it comes from her who has mounted on high adorned with heavenly favours. She is like some enchanted garden upon which the soft south wind breathes gently, rather, over which the breath of the Holy Spirit loves to brood, enriching it with the fragrance of his graces. Without the sun in the heavens to give light to the world, there can be no day; and without Mary our star to shine over life's vast and far-flung sea, we are all plunged into enshrouding gloom and the shadow of death: a night of utter darkness.

Let us honour Mary from the bottom of our hearts with the full vigour of mind and will: that is what God wants, since he wills that everything should come to us through her hands. That is what God wants, yes, but only so as to help us. For God looks after us his poor children in all our troubles, turning them to our advantage: he calms our anxious fears and stirs up confidence and trust, with him at our side hope revives and drives out uncertainty and doubt; the fainthearted find courage once again. In Adam we were all afraid to approach the Father: terrified at the mere sound of his voice we hid among the trees, and so he gave us Jesus to be our mediator. What limits can there be to the gifts that so filial a Son will obtain from so fatherly a Father? His piety will win him a hearing: the Father loves the Son. Can we be afraid to approach him, our Brother, our own flesh and blood, he who has been through every trial, fashioned as we are, only sinless, so that he could feel for us?—and it was Mary that gave us this Brother of ours. Yet, although he has become man, perhaps we stand in awe of the majesty of the Godhead that dwells on him—for he is still God—and want some advocate to plead our cause with him as well. Mary is our refuge: she is a creature pure and simple: pure from every stain and simple in her single nature. There can be no doubt that her piety too will win a hearing—the Son will listen to his mother, and the Father to his Son. Little children, this is the sinner's ladder; in it I put all my trust, it is the source of all my hope. Surely the Son can refuse his mother nothing, nor in his turn be refused, deny her a hearing or be denied. The angel said: 'You have found favour in the sight of God', and happily so: she will always find favour, always be full of grace, and grace is the one thing we need. Mary—the really prudent virgin—did not seek wisdom as Solomon did, nor yet riches, honours or power, but grace, the one thing alone by which we are saved.

Grace, then, is the only thing worth striving for: we must seek it, and seek it through Mary, since she always finds what she seeks and can never be disappointed. This grace that we seek is that which wins favour in God's sight, not in the fickle judgment of men: others may seek the approval of their fellows, but we the approval of God. What is the truth of the matter: that it is his grace that has brought us here, and it is only his mercy that preserves us. What manner of men are we? All in some degree



guilty of perjury, adultery, murder, and theft—the refuse of the world; and each one, if he is honest, must admit that where once was guilt in full measure, grace has now been bestowed more amply still. Mary, then, did not rely upon her own worth, but upon God's favour, the gift of his grace, and did so with such utter humility that she was much perplexed at the angel's greeting, and cast about in her mind what she was to make of it, thinking herself unworthy. Perhaps she said to herself 'How have I deserved to be thus visited by the angel of my Lord?' Mary, do not be afraid, do not be surprised that an angel should visit you. One greater than any angel is coming, and the Lord of the angels is with you. After all, it is only right that you, living the life of an angel, should see one, be visited by him and greeted as a fellow citizen and member of God's household. A virgin leads an angelic life: they who neither marry nor are given in marriage shall be as the angels of God.

Mary, you see, this aqueduct of ours, reached the fountainhead of all grace not by prayer alone but by her purity too, which makes a soul draw near to God. She was a virgin intent on holiness, holiness of body and holiness of spirit; she could say with greater truth than anyone else that her true home was in heaven. Body and spirit, both were holy: there must be no room for suspicion where she is concerned; loftiness is there but utter integrity as well. She is like a garden hedged all about, a spring shut in and sealed, she is the living temple of God, the chosen dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. She is no foolish virgin, she takes oil with her and has in her vessel a plentiful supply. She has set her heart on an upward journey, and it is her holiness of life and her prayer that bear her upwards. We read too that she rose up and went with all haste into the hill country and greeted Elizabeth, staying with her to help her for about three months. Then Mary could say to Elizabeth what Jesus later said to John, 'Let it be so for the present, it is well that we should thus fulfil all due observances'. Of Mary it can be said that her justice stands firm as the everlasting hills, and this journey of hers into the hill country shows the third way in which she reaches up to God; it is the third strand of the triple cord that is not easily broken. It was the bright flame of charity that led her in her search for grace, her spotless virginity made even her body beautiful, and it was the most sublime humility that made her offer her services

to Elizabeth. Everyone that humbles himself shall be exalted: what can be more sublime than humility? Elizabeth was astonished to see her and said: 'How have I deserved to be thus visited by the mother of my Lord?' Her astonishment must have increased, when she learnt that Mary, like her Son, had not come to have service done, but to serve others. It was of her that it had been written long before, 'Who is this, whose coming shows like the dawn of day? Fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army in battle array.' She rose far above the children of Adam, reached the choirs of angels, left them too beneath her, and found a place in heaven higher than any other creature: clearly she had to rise far above the angels if she was to draw from the source of living water and give to men to drink.

*(to be concluded)*



## ROSA RORANS BONITATEM:

### St Bridget of Sweden

ERIC COLLEDGE

THERE can be few saints of the late Middle Ages whose lives are so richly documented or so curiously varied as that of St Bridget of Sweden. A contemporary of St Catherine of Siena, she lived in Italy for a quarter of a century and played politics almost identical with those of Catherine, yet the two women never met; but their lives resemble each other at many points. Both of them were in their lifetime openly venerated as saints, a circumstance which must have been a further affliction to women each of a profound humility. Both of them were surrounded by 'families'; and in either case it appears that only the family's devotion to its mother held it together. Just as Catherine Benincasa seems to have given most of her trust to the English friar-hermit, William Flete, so the favoured son of St Bridget's largely Swedish 'family' was a Spaniard, the hermit ex-bishop Alphonse of Pecha; and Alphonse seems after Bridget's death to have suffered some of William Flete's neglect at the hands of the other devotees.

Bridget came to Rome for the jubilee of 1350, drawn from the rim of the known world, from a northern land beyond which was only a pagan night: but she descended upon Italy with a clearly-mapped campaign. God and his saints and angels, she claimed, constantly spoke familiarly with her, and she brought a secretariat to assist in her the work of recording these conversations in Swedish and turning them into Latin; and when she found that her staff's Latin was not up to modern Roman standards, she set to work to learn Latin herself, and put Alphonse in charge of the literary side of her work. Before his death, Alphonse and one of her Swedish chaplains successfully completed the editing of these day-to-day memoranda of Bridget's visions, which were issued as the 'Books of Celestial Revelations', in itself an achievement of medieval textual criticism of a magnitude comparable only with that of the vernacular Bible-translators of the age. But these 'Revelations', as Alphonse and his collaborators showed in their notes, had already achieved their first purpose in Bridget's lifetime: they are in effect a running commentary upon the personalities and events of the three disastrous decades which led up to the outbreak of the Great Schism in 1378, five years after her death. Gregory XI, vacillating in Avignon, is like a paralytic, unable to move hand or foot: this, Bridget told Gregory, was what Christ had said to her of him; and we have abundant evidence to show that when Gregory's predecessor was in flight from Rome, she pursued him to Montefiascone to tell him that only ruin and death awaited him in Avignon. The first object of her campaign was to recall the Holy See to Rome: and the second, to achieve which she sent her admonitions to the kings of England and France, was to bring about peace in Christendom, a true peace which could only come from the rule of Christ over the hearts of men.

Viewed merely as a mortal span, considered only as a temporal achievement, St Bridget's life in many ways was tragic. She was the seeress of a coming wrath, and not even St Catherine of Siena saw so clearly as she that the Church too had been given over into the hands of wicked men to be betrayed. With prophetic vision she saw that the day would come when the earthly dominions of the Popes would shrink to a little plot of land about St Peter's: but she also foresaw the endless miseries which the Church would suffer, and how many of these would be brought



about not by the Church's enemies, but by those who called themselves her sons and her lovers. And though Bridget was spared St Francis's anguish upon earth of seeing his followers in his lifetime quarrel and divide because they did not love poverty, her Rule for the monastery which she founded at Vadstena shows that she knew well how frail is mortal flesh: and indeed in the next century the houses of her Order were to be involved in a most bitter struggle over the financial benefits of their indulgences.

But to write of her life as a tragedy would be to forget altogether her spiritual qualities: her fortitude and resignation and utter abandonment in affliction to the will of God, the superb vigour and manliness with which she pursued her goals, hunting down popes and kings as the huntsman pursues the hare, and, above all, her heroic cheerfulness. When that famous enthusiast of the next century, Margery Kempe of Lynn, was in Rome, she spoke with one of St Bridget's maidservants, who told her that her mistress 'was ever laughing'. (Had she lived to know Margery Kempe, Bridget would surely have made short work of her floods of tears.) She was altogether a saint of her time, pierced and racked and broken by the contemplation of the Passion, swooning upon Mount Calvary, enacting in her 'contemplations' a part in the Nativity and the Crucifixion: and yet she is saved from mawkishness by qualities of dignity and sobriety which never leave her.

Like St Francis of Assisi (for whom she had deep devotion), St Bridget has had in this century a strong attraction for non-Catholics; and her native land seems now to take pride in her greatness. She has been especially well served by a truly eminent medievalist, Isak Collijn, most of whose long career was devoted to the study of the archives of the great European libraries which might yield evidence about her life and works; and his labour was crowned by his sumptuous edition of the minutes kept during the sittings of the commission appointed by Urban VI to hear witnesses in the cause of her canonization. This edition deserves to be better known, for it is one of the most enthralling texts which medieval hagiography has produced. The *mise-en-scène* and the personages are such as a Claudel might have dreamed; the time is March 1379, the place Rome, a Rome to which the Holy See had been restored only to have a worse evil than the Babylonian Captivity come upon it in the Schism. The pope who has

commissioned the opening of the cause is Bartholomew Prignano, the archbishop of Bari whose election to the chair of Peter had divided Christendom. The real organizers of the cause were Bridget's daughter Katherine and Alphonse of Pecha: she had saluted Prignano in St Peter's as the future pontiff before his election; Alphonse had been at the time the chosen intimate of Cardinal Peter de Luna, the future Benedict XIII, most unhappy of men, and had been an eye-witness of the tumults and despairs of the conclave. Even the formal legal documents produced before the assembled commissioners are meaningful: the king of Sweden who petitions for his country-woman's enrolment among the saints is the Albert of Mecklenburg who had come to fulfil Bridget's prophecies of doom, uttered when she as mistress of the household was serving Magnus Eriksson and his queen Blanche of Namur, and had driven Magnus out of his kingdom; and in the corresponding petition from one of Bridget's greatest devotees, Queen Joanna of Naples, even the date, October 1377, is significant, for a year later it was she who protected the conclave at Fondi which elected Robert of Geneva as the 'anti-pope'. Yet precisely because Urban still hoped that Joanna might be won over to his side, the witnesses to Bridget's sanctity were not allowed to do more than hint at one of her greatest earthly griefs, the liaison between her dissolute son Charles, whom she so dearly loved, and the notorious Joanna.

Those who have the perseverance to pursue their goals through the labyrinths of the dossier so splendidly edited by Collijn will find themselves rewarded both by the light shed upon many dark places and by the still unsolved mysteries which these present themselves. Those who wish to know Bridget and her times must go to his text of the *Acta et Processus*, and to one of the two available editions of her Latin *Revelations*, the first published at Lübeck in 1492 (the Bodleian library at Oxford possesses a copy of the issue printed on vellum and limited to sixteen copies; the British Museum owns the copy in which Anne Boleyn's father wrote his name), the second edited by Gonzalez Durante, bishop of Montefeltro, in the early seventeenth century. Most of the serious work done on Bridget in recent decades has, naturally, been published in Sweden; but some years ago one of the nuns of the English Brigittine house of Syon (who would be less than human if they were not proud to trace their unbroken lineage

back to the first sisters enclosed at Isleworth on the banks of the Thames by the favour of Henry V and his sister, Queen Philippa of Sweden), under her secular name of Helen Redpath published in America a first-class popular life of the mother of the Order, entitled *God's Ambassadors*. Unfortunately that work has not yet appeared in this country; instead we now have a much longer English biography, *St Bridget of Sweden* (Johannes Jorgensen, translated by Ingeborg Lund, 2 vols., Longmans, 1954, 15s. per volume). The author, described by his English publishers as 'the well-known Danish writer and mystic', is a Catholic convert who lived in Italy for many years, and whose lives of St Catherine of Siena and St Francis of Assisi have already appeared in English. He writes biography of a type which, though we know it well, has never, happily, been so fashionable or so tolerated in this country as in Germany and Scandinavia. Here is his account of the funeral of Charles: 'And Giovanna—after all, she had done some good—here in Naples she built a church to the glory of *Madonna Incoronata*, the great patroness of Apulia, and next to it she erected a hostel for the poor. "God is merciful", Bridget hears her whisper, "God is merciful!"—and how she weeps, nay sobs. So that her beautiful shoulders are shaken. Poor Giovanna. . . .'

The sloppy syntax, the irrelevant erudition, the bland refusal to be tied down by facts, and the remorselessly edifying sentiment, are all characteristic of one aspect of this book. Dr Jorgensen is determined that the simplest medieval Swedish peasant woman, a-telling of her beads, shall not vie with him in uncritical credulity and enthusiasm: he is in love with a Merrie Scandinavia, and Delehaye and the Bollandists have written for him in vain. But we shall be wrong if we dismiss his work as merely another piece of Glorious Technicolor: for his learning is immense, his knowledge of the documents minute, and his understanding of Bridget and everything to do with her profound, when he does allow these qualities to push through the turgid sea of his writing. When he chooses, he can bring a fine critical intelligence to his study of the primary sources. He points out, for example, the undertones of pique which are to be heard in Bridget's Swedish confessor's evidence in the canonization process, when he describes how he was superseded as her spiritual director and literary collaborator by Alphonse, 'though he did not understand the Swedish language'; and Jorgensen also shows how the true



source of all the stories repeated by witnesses at the process about Bridget's effulgence and levitation derive from one man, the witness Brother John of Pornaccio, the 'spiritual' from Todi. And every here and there we come upon a phrase in this book which does show Bridget to us as she really is, 'a voice, quiet and strong, stern and gentle, saying: "Oh, thou sinful being, turn back, for thou art walking in peril, and because thy heart is dark thou seest not the dangers of the road".'



## AN EDUCATIONAL CENTENARY

SISTER M. ALBERT, O.P.

ON August 1st, 1855, when the riots which had greeted the restoration of the Hierarchy in England were still a lively memory, a middle-class boarding school for boys was opened at Netherton House, Clapham. The needs of its four pupils were catered for by a Community of nine Religious, three of whom were already teaching in the primary school attached to the Redemptorist church. All nine of them were French, Brothers of the Christian Schools, an Institute founded by St John Baptist de La Salle in the seventeenth century and now making its first English foundation. The renting of the house on Lady Day seemed to augur well for the future of this initiative in the land that had once been Mary's Dowry. And so it proved. In May this year, 1955, some 250 Brothers and nearly 7,000 pupils in thirty-one educational establishments in England and Scotland, not to mention innumerable past pupils, relations and friends will be celebrating the centenary of that event. In Malta, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya and China, Brothers from England are at work, while an even larger Irish Province which has sent its members to these parts and to South Africa and Australia as well, is also the fruit of this same humble beginning. Such has been the mustard growth of one seed sown in the hey-day of England's Second Spring.

St John Baptist de La Salle (canonized in 1900 and proclaimed

Patron of Teachers in 1950), had been born when Cromwell was putting fresh vigour into the persecution of English—and still more of Irish Catholics. Having renounced the opportunities of social and ecclesiastical careerism which his noble birth opened out to him, he gave away his fortune and devoted himself to establishing a religious order for the education of the poorer classes. He soon enlarged his scope to include the middle class, realizing that their needs in this respect were hardly less acute, and his charity reached out even to the nobility when he provided schooling for the sons of the Irish gentry who had followed James II into exile at Saint Germain. When he died on Good Friday, April 7th, 1719, his Institute had spread to twenty-two different French towns as well as to Rome, though not without the opposition and reverses which usually greet the saints in their work for God and souls. Steady progress was maintained throughout the century and in 1789 there were 121 communities in France and six in other countries, but the *débâcle* of the Revolution swept away the former along with all the other religious Orders in France. Many of the Brothers were imprisoned and some martyred, one of whom, Brother Solomon, was beatified in 1926. Restored by a Decree of 1803, the Institute gradually recovered and adapted itself to the exigencies of the educational systems of nineteenth-century Liberalism. In 1838, with the appointment of Brother Philip as Superior General, it entered on a period of great achievement, and it was on the tide of his extension drive that the Brothers came to England in 1855.

With such a record behind them, and in a country in which voluntary effort in education had almost a free hand, they may have expected their course to be plain sailing. If so they were doomed to disappointment. 'Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone.' They came at a time when the State's kindly interest in voluntary education, as evinced in the grants for fully trained teachers, was soon to give place to its assumption of ultimate direction and control first of elementary education and later of secondary. Their progress was to be through set-backs, disappointments and apparent failure, and their story gives as it were a cross-section picture of the difficulties and struggles of the denominational schools under the 'Dual System'. But their achievement reflects that of the whole Catholic body in its struggle to defend 'the unity of "religious"

and "secular" education, clearly conceived, translated into action . . . and defended and extended at the cost of any sacrifice'.<sup>1</sup> That is why this year's centenary offers occasion for a more than merely domestic celebration and thanksgiving.

This is not the place to give even in outline the life and work of St John Baptist de La Salle or the progress of his Institute in this country. That has been admirably done in a series of books by one of his sons whose literary and academic distinctions are an excellent advertisement for the educational ideals which he represents.<sup>2</sup> But it may perhaps be of interest to dwell for a moment on one or two aspects of that ideal which received special mention in a Brief issued by the Holy Father in 1954 on the subject of the mission of the Institutes of Teaching Brothers.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of the International Health Exhibition at Kensington, in 1884, the contribution of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to the educational section came in for a good deal of admiration and publicity, earning for them tributes in many secular publications. In one of these, the *Journal of Education*, the writer concluded: 'The Brothers, from their Founder downwards, have adopted their calling, not to make money or to get promotion to fat livings . . . but from pure love of the work. Teaching to them is not a trade but a profession, or rather a vocation.'<sup>4</sup> The problem of career, i.e. means of livelihood, versus 'vocation' in the narrow sense of religious vocation, is not unknown among the difficulties which beset Catholic education. But in the wider sense of the word the formation and instruction of youth is a vocation of the highest importance both to the Church and to civil society; and unless it is approached in the spirit of dedication and unselfish zeal (of which a perverted form appears in totalitarian states), it is unlikely to achieve its real purpose.

In all the Church's teaching Orders, the work of education becomes the material of that complete consecration and dedication to God in which religious profession consists. But this is especially apparent in an Institute of men such as the Brothers of the Christian Schools who, in the words of the Holy Father,

<sup>1</sup> A. C. F. Beales in his Introduction to *The De La Salle Brothers in Great Britain*, by W. J. Battersby, PH.D., Burns & Oates, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> *De La Salle: Pioneer of Modern Education; De La Salle: Saint and Spiritual Writer; De La Salle: Letters and Documents; De La Salle: Meditations* (Longmans), and *Brother Potamian, Educator and Scientist* (Burns & Oates), by W. J. Battersby.

<sup>3</sup> Apostolic Brief dated March 31st, 1954.

<sup>4</sup> *Journal of Education*, July 1884.



'by a special divine vocation, renounce the priestly dignity and the consolations that are derived therefrom', so as to devote all the energy of their consecrated lives to the work of the education of youth. They are not 'spoiled priests', nor would they be better educators if they were priests as well, nor more useful to the Church if they were priests instead of educators. St de La Salle was himself a priest, yet he insisted that all the members of his Institute should be explicitly debarred from aspiring to the priesthood. To remove possible sources of temptation they were even forbidden to read or to teach Latin (a prohibition only removed from the Rule by the personal intervention of Pius XI in 1923), or to take anything that might be interpreted as a clerical part in ecclesiastical functions.

Yet the Brothers are far from being anti-clerical. The Holy Father mentions with pleasure the 'powerful aid' brought to the Church by the number of clerical and religious vocations from the Brothers' schools and the Superior General of the De La Salle Brothers comments: 'Let us not forget that the blossoming of clerical and religious vocations in a Christian school is the unequivocal sign that it is a garden of the Lord, as it ought to be, a garden where it is quite normal to see the development of the calls which Divine Providence makes to generous souls'.<sup>5</sup> Does this criterion of the success of a Catholic school always receive such priority? The Brothers of the Christian Schools, at least, pass the test with flying colours. In England at the present day they count among their Old Boys one Bishop (Bishop Siedle, W.F.), 385 priests and 145 seminarians; while for the Institute as a whole the grand total of major clerics alone is: 14 Cardinals, 33 Archbishops, 126 Bishops and eight Superiors General of other Religious Congregations.

But if the Brothers aim primarily at turning their pupils into good and even perfect Christians, they are not for all that out-of-date or 'other-worldly' where secular education is concerned. Quite the contrary. As their Founder was in the van of educational development in his day, a pioneer in such matters as the direct method of teaching in the vernacular and in the establishment of training colleges for teachers and of industrial schools for delinquents, so the Brothers in England have been in the forefront of the development of Catholic education during the past one

<sup>5</sup> *Administrative Circular*, No. 344, p. 24.

hundred years, always ready to step into the breach when some new initiative was called for. They have concentrated on middle-class and special schools because here the need was greatest, and today they direct eleven grammar schools, two secondary modern schools, and ten Home Office Approved Schools, as well as one of the country's two Catholic Training Colleges for men. As the crowning glory of their contribution to the civic life of the country they can count among their alumni a Lord Mayor of London, Sir William Dunn, a Mayor of Westminster, Sir John Gatti, and a Chairman of the London County Council, Sir John Gilbert. But the Brothers are surely no less proud of a tribute paid in the name of the Home Secretary to one of their members who had devoted his life to the work in Approved Schools: 'It is impossible to overestimate the value of that form of service to society which lies in reclaiming boys from a course of conduct that leads to crime'.<sup>6</sup>

The domestic centre of the centenary celebrations will be St Joseph's College, Beulah Hill, the lineal successor of Netherton House. But the high-light will be the Solemn High Mass in Westminster Cathedral, sung by Bishop Siedle with the Cardinal presiding, and in the presence of the Apostolic Delegate, a number of bishops, and Her Majesty's Minister of Education, on May 24th. In such a gathering for such an act, may we not see the symbol and source of past achievement and a confident pledge of future success? *Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam. Ad multos annos!*



## THE PARISH VISITORS OF MARY IMMACULATE

A. J. REILLY

ONE of the marks of the living Church is its ability to inspire leaders in every age especially fitted to meet the needs of the age. Never has there been a time when the spiritual soil was so infertile that it was unable to produce valiant

men and women to answer the challenge of the world. In the past there was a St Dominic, a St Francis, a St Teresa. In later centuries there were names like Pernet and Hecker and Rice. And these are but a few of the thousands from the time of St Paul to our own day raised by God as leaders in their own particular day and hour.

Against this background of inspired leadership we are inclined to think that our own age, especially the years since the end of the first world war, are barren indeed. We see only spiritual aridity, the noxious weed of materialism run riot. Yet in this, our own age, was born the idea embodied in the Legion of Mary, now a worldwide institution, the Medical Missionaries of Mary, the Parish Visitors of Mary Immaculate, these last amid the unrestrained pleasure-seeking of the hectic nineteen-twenties in the United States where, the superficial observer would say, no spiritual seed could take root.

Changing conditions of life, war's aftermath, rapidly growing cities with their shifting populations were all tending to weaken the ties that bind souls to God. In the vast rural areas served with so great difficulty before the advent of the motor car many families had all but forgotten their Catholic beginnings. There were also countless immigrants whose language difficulties cut them off from the Church. All these strayed sheep must be sought and returned to the fold. This was the challenge of the age of pleasure. It was answered by the Parish Visitors of Mary Immaculate, the fruit of one young woman's preoccupation with Christ's command, 'Feed my sheep'.

Mother Mary Teresa Tallon, foundress of the Parish Visitors, conceived the idea of reaching these scattered sheep through a parish census. It may be objected that this was nothing new, that priests have been taking census of their parishioners since there have been parishes. But there is a difference. Mother Tallon did not propose to take a census of the *parishioners*, but of the *parish*: that is, to visit every house and family within the parish area regardless of their known religious status.

To convince the proper authorities of the reasonableness of her idea and to obtain the co-operation of parish priests were the first steps, which, as in all foundations, were not easy. Nevertheless, when the work is of God the obstacles give way. Mother Tallon's plan was simple and practical. On the invitation of the



parish priest the Parish Visitors would go into a parish and make a house-to-house visitation collecting the usual data necessary for the administration of the parish and at the same time seeking the straying.

I distinctly recall my first contact with the Parish Visitors. I was sharing an apartment with two friends in one of New York's big apartment houses—each a little village in itself. One day I answered the bell to find two nuns at the door. I regarded them a bit suspiciously at first. Their habit was entirely unfamiliar, and—well, it was New York where anything could happen.

'We are Parish Visitors', said one with a friendly smile. 'The Reverend Pastor has invited us to take a census of the parish. Are there any Catholics here?'

'We're all Catholics', I answered, which seemed to please the sisters. Then followed the usual census questions and the sisters took their leave. When my friends returned we discussed briefly the novelty of having nuns take a parish census and then forgot the incident.

Much later I learned how small a part of the picture I had seen. The Parish Visitors are religious, trained in the contemplative life. They are also professional social workers, family counsellors and trained catechists. Their formal preparation requires three years, but to the end of their lives they continue learning, learning to sense the burdens, sorrows and problems of souls bereft of grace, learning to depend on their patroness, Mary Immaculate, in their search for souls, learning every day to trust God more and themselves less.

When invited into a parish they literally knock at every door in the parish area. If a door fails to open they go again and even again until, at last, the blessed Mother manages to open the door for them to enter as messengers of her divine Son. Frequently their greatest work is done where doors open reluctantly for their introductory question means much more than I had imagined when I first heard it. It means really, 'Are there any troubled souls here, souls seeking grace, souls bereft of peace?' It means this and more.

Their training as family counsellors plus the inspiration of the Holy Ghost helps them to detect the momentary hesitancy, the slight uncertainty of tone, the quick shadow passing across a face. The harsh, blunt 'No', need not be accepted always as the

final word. Met with a smile and a warm 'Thank you', it often weakens to 'Well—er—that is', whereupon the Sisters go into action, as it were. They would say, however, that our Lady goes into action. They only follow her commands like well-trained soldiers.

Sometimes it is a Catholic away from the sacraments so long that he has almost forgotten he is a Catholic. Sometimes it is a soul darkened by prejudice or hatred or one struggling blindly to the light. Sometimes it is a marriage that has to be made right, a matter of personal pique or merely carelessness. For many non-Catholics it is their first contact with Catholic nuns or religious, and they are touched by the warmth, the human kindness, the understanding and genuine sympathy of these hitherto strange creatures. Often the Parish Visitors receive greatly appreciated help from the non-Catholic homes they visit. 'No, we're not Catholics here, but my brother's wife' (or 'my daughter's husband' or 'the lodger' or 'the family next door') 'belong to your Church.' This information all too frequently is followed by the qualification, 'They don't go to church much.'

The work of the Parish Visitors is for no particular class. Often the rich are in as great need of spiritual alms as the poor. Their sympathy and advice, as well as their prayers, are given as freely to the non-Catholic as to their co-religionist. Their work lies wherever the spiritual soil needs tending. Often it requires much tact and patience, many wearisome visits and incessant prayers. The joy, when the task is accomplished, is three-fold. It fills the hearts of the Sisters, it radiates from the returned soul and echoes in heaven.

Working now in nine dioceses in the United States they have proven their worth as seekers of lost sheep, whether in the large city parishes with their heterogeneous populations and veritable babel of tongues, or in rural areas with their vastly different problems. They are diviners and their rod is grace.

Daily appeals for the help of the Parish Visitors come to Mother Tallon's desk from all over the country and even from outside. An army of millions, instead of hundreds, would seem unable to cope with the needs, and Mother Tallon envisages even greater need when the Iron Curtain is raised. She is not worried, however. She knows that God will send the workers. Meantime, as she looks out from the lovely hilltop in Monroe, New York,

where the Mother House is situated, over the vast field of the world, she begs her friends to join the Sisters in their prayers for vocations and still more vocations, that none of the straying sheep may be lost.



## CONSCIENCE<sup>1</sup>

BEDE JARRETT, O.P.

**I**N guiding ourselves in the way of our Blessed Lord, we have to a certain extent to be left to our own conscience and we can't put on to the shoulders of any one else the decision. Obedience settles much in religion, but there must always be a margin over 'when?'. A number of things in the spiritual life are left to our own judgment, decision and prudence, details outside obedience, where authority may not or cannot enter. A vast region lies under our own rule. To guide this we have a faculty that goes by the name of conscience. It is not the voice of God, not like God whispering; it is a moral faculty. We have born in us the musical faculty. Now that is part of us, it can be trained well or ill, made to choose that which is best in music or less good; also the faculty of speech, we can speak well or ill, pronounce our words well or not. Just such a faculty is our conscience, the power of selecting what is good or what is ill. Though born with us, much depends on our education: you can teach a child almost anything you will. The human mind can be educated. Conscience is our moral faculty for telling moral right from wrong and it is infallible when properly trained. We cannot tell ourselves that we are right because our conscience allows us, we know from experience that our conscience can lose the power of judging truly. Our fingertips are sensitive, but if we burn them the skin hardens and they lose their sensitiveness. Sin has the same effect on our conscience. At one time our conscience would have been very clamorous over certain of our acts, now it is deadened, or the other way round. Some people

<sup>1</sup> From notes taken during a retreat to religious.



are much more severe after breakfast, especially on others, and so conscience varies with health, or goodness, or lack of goodness. *You are your conscience*, you have *made* it. You are responsible for your conscience. We make it what we like and must say not only 'does my conscience allow this' but '*ought* my conscience to allow it'. Protestants say 'do what you *think* is right and you *are* right'. So far it is true, but you must train your conscience not only from within but from without—the Church does this. There are some things we could never train our conscience to tell us correctly. Conscience requires to be trained by the Church. The sermon on the mount, the Gospels, are ways given by our Lord to train our conscience. A sensitive thing, a growing thing. Our conscience then lies at our own mercy and it is our business then to see, especially in retreat time, whether it is behaving as it should. It is a good thing to take the teaching of the Church, take the simple Catechism and read through it, not from the point of view of teaching but for our own instruction, from the point of view of learning.

In this matter there are two separate things to be considered. Firstly, the principles by which my conscience judges the commandments and doctrines of the Church. But I can't say if conscience is right because I have behind me the infallible Church. We think we told a lie, but *is* this a lie I am telling? It is wrong to lie, but was I lying? I know I have taken vows of Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, but *is* this against Obedience, or Poverty, or Chastity? Principles are not enough here. Human life is extraordinarily complex. Books and human guides we may consult, but they, those I ask, have to take my word for what I say. Though I accept the principle I must be thrown to a large extent on my own resources. My statement must be necessarily incomplete because of all sorts of things too intimate and intricate to describe. We have so often to make decisions on the spur of the moment. Am I right in not speaking or ought I to speak? Ought authority to know this? I must rely on my own judgment. Others whom we ask are naturally affected by the way in which we present the case. No two people see the same thing; we *see* it differently from different points of view. How then can I see in the delicate duty of deciding what to do? I must rely on my own judgment. Have I anything to help me to settle the delicate cases of conscience which I have to settle? Yes—and no. No, in a

sense for I must make my own judgment. In your vocation, for example, you *must* make your own decision, listen to advice, but at the judgment seat it will be no use to say 'Father so-and-so told me to enter'. God will say 'Who's he?' It is a personal process, and so important; if we have judged badly we shall be condemned, if rightly rewarded.

Secondly, I must judge according as it affects my whole life. In the realm of conscience by my own bare will I must decide—my own will? No—not entirely. I want to settle things as God wants me to, to get hold of God's particular view, to speak or be silent as he wants me to speak or be silent. What do I want, or think? What God wants or thinks of it? How am I to find out, to settle it? One way I shall settle it by the goodness of my life, that will affect my conscience, such good as there is in me or such evil. When we live with people and love them we instinctively know their views; if we live with God and try to do what he wants and are steadily obedient to others whom God has set over us, it would seem that we shall make good judgments.

So it will depend upon my general goodness. The needle points steadily to the north, your soul is steadily turned to God and if we try to quicken our love our judgment will be true to God. Lucifer was a perfectly ordered kingdom, obedient to the least breath of God. Then he fell, sin dominated his will and obscured his reason and the reason no longer obeyed the law of God. Our Lady was freed and her reason obeyed the law of God. The saints ended where our Lady began. We live in this bothered state; as St Paul says, 'I do not the good which I will; but the evil which I hate, that I do'. I long to love and serve God but I do not the things that I would. To get it back that our reason should respond to God's will is the *end of life*. Conscience judging truly. And so if we work as we *must* to keep our conscience right we must go back to the moral principles and on the application of principles depends my love and service of God. If I try to follow God's law I can take it for granted my conscience will be usually right. If I live carelessly God's will will neither be heard nor understood, nor carried out; we shall have a slipshod conscience. For us then this must be clear, that we can't say 'my conscience lets me'—should my conscience let me? We must rely on our conscience even in Religion. My conscience must follow from my general love of God. If we do our best we have a right to

God's help. Over and over again in guiding ourselves or giving advice to others we are probably wrong, giving out mischief all our lives. What a deal of evil we may be doing unintentionally. If our lives have not tried to be faithful our advice may be doing harm to souls who have trusted us. So God must help us, and God *will* help us as we are faithful and trust to God's inspirations. We shall be judged not only for our lives but for our conscience. Life is the result of conscience, conscience the result of life, round and round in a circle.

Remember, our conscience will judge truly according to the measure of our LOVE.



## REVIEWS

THE GOLDEN STRING. By Bede Griffiths, O.S.B. (The Harvill Press; 12s. 6d.)

'To follow up the vision which we have seen, to keep it in mind when we are thrown back again on the world, to live in its light and to shape our lives by its law . . . ' this, for Dom Bede Griffiths, is to wind in William Blake's 'golden string' which 'will lead you in at heaven's gate built in Jerusalem's wall'. The vision (and it is, in no derogatory sense, a visionary's book) came first with the schoolboy's sudden initiation, on a lovely evening early in summer, to 'another world of beauty and mystery' to which man properly belongs. Drawn insistently on by this ancient beauty he was led away from the restless fictions and ugly output of modern life to God and to the Catholic faith and to monasticism at Prinknash Abbey. And the very account is written with a beauty and sensitiveness that reflect the constant ideal in the background.

His generation was bewildered and disillusioned, the post-war generation of the 20's. 'We did not belong anywhere. That was part of our misery; whether we liked it or not we were uprooted like the rest of the world, and wherever we went we could not escape ourselves.' All too many of that generation, finding, as they thought, in morality law without love, in religion conformity without deep inspiration, nourished themselves upon the light food of romanticism and politics, until both turned to wormwood in the 30's. Dom Bede instead, with the same starting point, plunged roots deep, first into the past (which he



and his Oxford companions discovered in book and stone), then into the real earth of the Cotswolds (by an experiment in living the same in principle as that of the Desert Fathers), and at last (discovering Scripture) into the absolute ground, God.

The climax came after a night of prayer: 'the hard casing of exterior reality seemed to have been broken through, and everything disclosed its inner being'. Certainly a great deal was still to be learned, but prayer was the key that had turned the lock. Yet he had still to be taught by the Catholic Church, and particularly by the discipline of monastic life, that this and the other instruments of his entry into truth could not be handled without subtle danger: 'I realised that what I had been seeking was a fantasy under which my own self-will was disguised. . . . I had followed my own desires for so long and worked out my own ideal, that it was difficult for me to see that the process had now to be reversed.' When God leads, it is obedience and detachment that are demanded of the creature; and it had been God leading all the time. . . .

This is a notable book. It is more than the unfinished autobiography of one man; it records the spiritual experience, in the most authentic tones, of a whole generation—a generation in captivity; and it shows how one man has found freedom. Some readers may feel (and I think the author certainly feels) that the journey is still to be continued. The last chapters of the book are less certain than the main portion—as if there is still a balance to be achieved, a perfect charity still to be laid hold of towards that modern world and its achievements which made the prison. Are they not materials, which, rebuilt, may yet make the temple of God?

COLUMBA RYAN, O.P.

THE CONFESSIONS OF ST AUGUSTINE. Tr. by Sir Tobie Matthew, K.T., revised and edited by Dom Roger Hudleston. (The Orchard Books; Burns Oates; 15s.)

The volumes of the new Orchard series are designed to adorn a bookshelf rather than to fit a pocket. They are in fact about three times as large as their forerunners of the old series, and quite four times as expensive. Otherwise this edition by Dom Hudleston of Augustine's *Confessions* is identical with the one which first appeared in 1923.

The editor is surely right to include the last three books of reflections on the first chapter of Genesis. As he remarks in the introduction, while the exegesis may be a little old-fashioned nowadays, it is of value as a corrective to the attitude of people who, in Sir Tobie's rendering of Augustine, 'are so hot upon the negative that Moses did not mean that which I say, but that which they say'. But more than that, these Books XI-XIII are integral to Augustine's design in writing the *Confessions*.

His latest biographer, Professor O'Meara, accepts the common judgment that Augustine didn't know how to plan a book. Hence the tangled jungle of the *City of God* and the ill-assorted jumble of the *Christian Doctrine*; hence also this incongruous tail to the *Confessions*. But it would perhaps be truer to say that Augustine had such a keen sense of pattern and design that he could never fit his books into the obvious or merely conventional scheme. On top of this, his unflagging pursuit of the intricacies of a pattern effectively obscure its main lines for the reader, by making him giddy with mental fatigue.

The *Confessions* then will not fit the conventional category of religious autobiography. As the Xth book shows, Augustine combined a staggering power of self-examination, a most lively awareness of himself, with a complete lack of self-consciousness. So he was not in the least interested in his own religious experience for its own sake, but quite fascinated by it as manifesting a design—the design of God's redeeming grace. The confession of his own sins is only a means for the confession of God's praise. And the design which he sees worked out in the microcosm of himself, of a being created by God (like Tristram Shandy he begins the story of his life from the womb), broken away from God, and then created anew by God in grace, this design he contemplates again in the macrocosm as it is shown us in the Genesis story of creation. His meditations on it, culminating in its allegorical interpretation, might be called a treatise on God the one author of nature and grace. And so in Book XI, c. 2, he prays for grace to understand the Scriptures in these words: 'I beseech thee by thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ . . . thy Word through whom thou madest all things, and amongst them me also; thine only begotten Son, by whom thou didst call to adoption the multitude of believers, and me amongst them, by him do I beg this grace . . . in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. These same treasures do I seek in thy books.'

E.H.

LA GRANDE PRIÈRE EUCHARISTIQUE. Par J. A. Jungmann. Traduction de l'allemand par Marc Zemb. (Cerf; n.p.)

In four sections this book consists of the best type of liturgical commentary, taking and expanding four key phrases from the Ordinary of the Mass: *Memores*, *Offerimus*, *Plebs Sancta*, *Socia Exultatione*. *Memores*: if we are to appreciate fully the sacrifice of the altar we must bear in mind that God the Father has once and for all accepted Christ's sacrifice (Heb. IX, 24-28); we may overlook this if we insist exclusively on immolation and forget the commemoration. *Offerimus*: it is truly our sacrifice with Christ; in opposition to the Gnostics the early Fathers of the Church had to emphasize the holiness of the material we offer.

*Plebs sancta*: we are a holy people and therefore must physically share in the celebration. This does not necessarily demand an altar facing the people: Fr Jungmann is only in favour of this for small congregations, because the traditional orientation of the altar has its own significance. *Socia exultatione*: as the blessed in heaven share the joy of the Mass, so at the other end of the scale we must see that our liturgical embellishments do not exclude the rank and file of the congregation.

This is a stimulating commentary because the author is enthusiastic without being a fanatic. He would like to see the congregation filing to the altar to offer their hosts for consecration but appreciates the difficulties: he would like sufficient vernacular in the Mass of the Catechumens to remind the faithful how God has accepted Christ's sacrifice. To the discussion he brings a wealthy array of learning, theology, history, art; but we are never overawed because all is subordinated to the purpose of making the Mass more real in our lives. This is helped not a little by his gift for dramatic presentation: 'Nous voyons l'Eglise gravir la montagne sainte, si l'on peut dire. Sur le sommet de la montagne, elle reçoit l'offrande des mains du Seigneur et présente le sacrifice avec lui.' Only once or twice do the suggestions for liturgical 'reform' sound like special pleading. This is a thoroughly stimulating book, as practical as it is learned.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

GESCHIEDENIS VAN DE VROOMHEID IN DE NEDERLANDEN. Vol. II: *De Eeuw van Ruusbroec*. By Stephanus Axters, O.P. (De Sikkel, Antwerp; 380 fr. belg.)

This second volume, *The Age of Ruusbroec*, of Fr Stephanus Axters' *History of Piety in the Netherlands*, must be read as a sequel, if its methods and conclusions are to be duly esteemed. In the first volume, dealing with the 'Frankish period' (the fifth to tenth centuries) the author discusses in some detail several groups of highly significant texts. One of the earliest is 'The Book of Visions' in the *Vita Aldegundis* (St Aldegunde of Mauberge, ob. 684: Acta SS Jan. iii), perhaps originally composed in the Frankish vernacular, in which a man appears to the saint to announce that Christ is to be her Bridegroom, and she replies in our Lady's words to the angelic messenger; and later Axters describes the *Pigmenta* of St Anscharius (ob. 865), a 'garland' of 150 devout orisons which he used to recite as adjuncts to his psalter, 'ut ei psalmi hac de causa dulcescerent'. Without doubt in the 'Book of Visions' we have an exceptionally early manifestation of the *Brautmystik* which has characterized Netherlands piety throughout its history; and in the concept of the *Pigmenta*, the admixture of the wine of the liturgy, the *opus Dei*, with the honey of private devotions, we have one of the seeds from



which the 'Hours of the Passion' and all the other great devotional exercises, including the Rosary itself, were to grow.

Little is as yet known of the early history of such devotions; and it is to be regretted that Fr Axters has adhered to the plan which he followed in his first volume, that he has chosen to trace the history of piety as it is organized and recorded for us in the chronicles of the religious Orders, and that he has postponed his partial and cursory account of the development of lay piety until the very end of his work. His view that until the early fourteenth century secular devotions were a mere reflection of organized conventual life, and that it is only then that we find a 'spiritual emancipation of the laity', is open to objection. It is true that from c. 1300 onwards we do find a great profusion of evidence of such an 'emancipated piety', but it can hardly have been such a sudden growth as is here suggested. Had Fr Axters given due consideration to the medieval Dutch religious lyrics and mystery plays, and had he compared them with the two great Old Saxon biblical vernacular epics, he might have been less ready to assume that the laity of the centuries for which evidence is scarce were unemancipated. One may not unjustly compare the Frankish Netherlands in this respect with Anglo-Saxon England, and recall that the recently-discovered Old English *Poem on Fasting* has provided evidence of a well-developed satirical, anti-clerical trend of thought which hitherto has been associated only with a much later period.

We may also ask how far Fr Axters reconciles his dating of the emergence of lay devotion and piety with his very proper statement that one of the marks of such spiritual emancipation is a growing acquaintance, by one means or another, with the subject-matter of the Bible. So far as biblical iconography is concerned, the author seems to regard as specifically fourteenth-century and specifically Netherlands a number of developments (such as the accretion in Crucifixion scenes of supernumerary figures, Adam and Eve, it may be, the Old and New Churches, or the sun and moon in eclipse) which are certainly earlier and which are probably directly or indirectly Byzantine in origin. On medieval Dutch biblical texts Professor Margaret Deanesly's *Lollard Bible* is still superior to the present work as a guide; and in his treatment of this subject, as elsewhere, one can observe a certain reluctance in Fr Axters to accept the conclusion that no history such as his can be written without account being taken of the formative piety and devotion of men and women whom medieval churchmen condemned as heretics. His descriptions, fascinating as they are, of such sects as the Flagellants and such enthusiasts as the Dancers, are not really integral; had Fr Axters been better acquainted with medieval English piety and with some of the standard critical works on it, notably those of Miss

Hope Allen, he might perhaps have seen his way more clearly towards an unified treatment of such material.

None of these foregoing remarks must be taken as suggesting that Fr Axters is unaware of such possibilities in his material. He takes full account, for example, of the recent work of Professor Grundmann and Dr Guarnieri (and he has himself been able to suggest, on what seem to be valid grounds, a narrower dating of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* to within the years 1300-1306): and one of the most interesting and valuable preliminaries to his discussion of Ruysbroek's doctrine is his examination of Fr van Mierlo's contention that some of the highly characteristic terms which Ruysbroek uses, such as 'bare' and 'empty', are Dutch in origin. Re-examining the material used as evidence by Professor Grundmann, Axters finds against van Mierlo, and for the probability, already suggested by Dom Combes on different grounds, that Eckhart and Ruysbroek derived many of their ideas and the language in which they clothed them from common sources of which our chief evidence consists in thirteenth-century anonymous German texts.

Fr Axters compares, as he was bound to do, the use of such terms in religious texts with their occurrence in the works of the poets of courtly love, Hartmann von Aue, Walter von der Vogelweide and others; but elsewhere in this work he shows that one of Ruysbroek's outstanding qualities is his freedom from courtly influences. Much as Ruysbroek honoured and learned from Hadewijch, he utterly eschewed her use, for divine ends, of the symbols and metaphors of earthly love poetry: his celebrations of the love of God are indeed more truly representative of the Beguine movement, homely, unsophisticated, unadorned. The Beguines, however, are only one of the formative influences which Axters discerns in the canon of Ruysbroek's works: in the *Limburg Sermons* he finds the beginnings of Dutch exemplarism, in the *Gaesdonck Tracts*, some of which in their present form may be Dutch versions of originals composed by Eckhart, a 'Logos-mystique' at all times close to Eckhart's teaching.

It is difficult to perceive exactly how the opening of this second volume, an account, interesting in itself and full of pregnant suggestions, of the institution of an educational syllabus in the University of Paris and in the various religious orders, notably the Dominican, which supplied it with teachers and pupils, serves as a prologue to this history of Ruysbroek and his age. One may indeed think that in general too much attention has been paid to the minutiae of Dominican history at the expense of others, notably the Carthusians, whose influence upon and debt to Ruysbroek was greater. So, too, in considering Ruysbroek's sources, this work, though it goes deeper than any other recent author-

ity, still fails to give us what perhaps only Denifle could have achieved had he lived long enough, an exhaustive and serious estimation of the debt of Tauler and Ruysbroek to Eckhart and to Eckhart's sources. But if such a study ever comes to be written, its author, even though he will be obliged to cover territory not explored in this work, will find none the less that Fr Axters has immensely eased his way there.

ERIC COLLEDGE

SHORT MEDITATIONS FOR PRIESTS. From the French of Rev. A. M. Meley, C.S.S.R. Translated and adapted by Rev. John J. Doyle, C.S.S.R. (M. H. Gill and Son Ltd., Dublin; 15s.)

A little book of this sort is needed and could be a ready help to many priests who have good desires and good will in the matter of mental prayer. It could especially help those unfortunate priests who might be tempted to think that there is little or no time for meditation in their busy, breathless days. For the meditations presented, besides being adapted to the clergy generally, are short, and could form the matter of 5-10 minute meditations. At the same time, because of the many Scriptural citations which give so much more 'content', they could serve as outlines for the customary half-hour or longer meditations.

Less happy is the adaptation from the French which has resulted in much standard phrasing and conventional religious language, all of which detract from the effectiveness of such meditation-plans (for such they are), making them much weaker instruments of spiritual result. For many, however, the most serious deficiency would be a seeming lack of more properly theological order. It is true that the various meditations are grouped under headings (thus:—I. The Priest—His Virtues—His Duties—His Failings. II. The Great Truths. III. Jesus Christ—The Great High Priest. IV. Mary—The Mother of the Priest. V. The Priest's Models). But there is a much more essential ordering of all, including meditation subjects, under God, and more precisely in their proper place in the total return of all creatures to God. And then this very ordering in itself, in its profundities and complexities (for God writes straight even with crooked lines) serves to mirror the mind of God, and becomes a wonderful theme for meditation, not least when we think on Christ our Lord who is *Via nobis tendendi in Deum*.

FR. ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

LES INSTITUTS SÉCULIERS. By Jean Beyer, S.J. (Desclée de Brouwer; 150 frs. b.)

The rise of those pious associations now known by the proper name



of Secular Institutes shows most clearly that the Church is very much alive with the Spirit of God, and that it has as a living organism the power within it of adaptation to the changing conditions of society. History shows that a number of nameless organizations without any official status in the general law of the Church by a mysterious impulse sprang into being, largely among the laity. They were all impelled by an apostolic zeal and a desire to live the religious life under vows whilst living in the world, and usually continuing to wear secular attire. Pope Pius XII in his apostolic constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* 1947 not only gives these societies official recognition, but has given them their proper legal title and the charter of their foundation.

This book is an important contribution to the study of these Secular Institutes which have become an outstanding institution in the life of the Church today, and tend to increase and multiply, under the initial impulse which gave them being. This is a subject which will attract the interest not only of those who belong to these institutes or to societies which are on the way to receiving the status of Secular Institutes, but to all those who wish to understand their aims and way of living, and the manner in which they have gradually developed. As is shown, the first great pioneer in this field was Père de Clorivière, who in 1791 founded two societies—one for men and the other for women. The former comprised in its membership priests and laymen. The book is well documented and to be recommended.

AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.

SHEPHERD'S TARTAN. By Sister Mary Jean Dorcy, O.P. (Sheed and Ward; 9s. 6d.)

Whether it is Divine Providence or sheer serendipity Mr Frank Sheed seems to have an uncanny flair for the real vintage writer and to find his way unerringly to the one who can turn words into magic, phrases into features and paragraphs into works of art: Caryll Houselander, Lucile Hasley, and now Sister Mary Jean Dorcy.

The present book is a bubbling description of the experiences of a girl in the process of becoming a nun (Dominican) followed by a series of idyllic but piquant, penetrating essays, in a sort of film-shot manner, on various phases and aspects of real life in a real convent: a very Pied Piper of a book that should draw hundreds of girls to the convent gate, and further. It is also a portrayal, effective because indirect, of the heart and soul of a nun.

All sorts of incidental reflections on life in general—for instance a commonsense chapter on the way mere human sorrow enters into the life of a nun—make it a useful book for others besides girls who want to know what a vocation to the cloister means. In fact the incidental

reflection occasionally gives an impression of padding, but it is good padding and makes one hope that Sister Mary Jean will find time and opportunity in future books to talk at random on these and all kindred subjects.

Her description of a nun's life begins with the first glimmering of a vocation and takes us from school days to postulancy, to novitiate, to profession and beyond. Hers is a teaching Order, but she bears in mind the needs and temperament of those who are not called to teach, but to be nuns, just nuns. She has something to say even of contemplative nuns, and this is a section where her dexterous pencil has, perhaps, failed to put in a few lines which might have improved the picture.

On the whole this is just the book to put into the hands of anyone whose ideas of convent life and vocation need clarifying, developing, completing—that is, everybody.

GERARD M. CORR, O.S.M.

SCIENCE AND THE HUMAN IMAGINATION. Aspects of the History and Logic of Physical Science. By Mary B. Hesse (S.C.M. Press; 12s. 6d.)

In some ways the sub-title of this book gives a rather better indication of its contents than the title itself; for the book is a study in the history of scientific method, and it is only in the later pages that the more general issues implied in the title are confronted. This, I am sure, is the right way to go about the question, but it does mean that Miss Hesse will have to write another book to complete the message she has to give to us. And I, for one, will look forward to reading it, because Miss Hesse writes with that sort of clarity and elegance one associates with mathematicians—she is Lecturer in Mathematics at the University of Leeds. Furthermore she has a grasp of history, an ability to see things from a historical standpoint, such as few mathematicians and physical scientists possess. In this respect her book is far superior, for instance, to Canon Raven's Gifford Lectures—though it will, no doubt, receive less attention.

Pleasant as it would be to quote certain observations in this book and to repeat the acute criticisms it contains of Philosophers of Science, the readers of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* are more likely to be interested in the conclusions arrived at. Here is one conclusion, which I quote because I have only slowly become convinced of it and because it contradicts a deep-set prejudice:

'However necessary logical and mathematical formulations may be in the progress of physics and in certain parts of the other sciences, we need not fall victims to the sort of mentality which dismisses any statement not couched in exact symbolism on the grounds that

it is vague and probably misleading. For the exactness, the univocity of logic is not found in the real world either in physical or in human phenomena; therefore the most accurate descriptions of the world are more akin to poetry than to mathematical logic.'

DONALD NICHOLL

THE PRIEST IN THE WORLD. By Josef Sellmair. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne; 18s.)

This is a book by a German priest on the life and ideals of the secular clergy. The author, obviously widely read and experienced, is dealing with the attitudes that should characterize the priest's outlook, rather than with apostolic techniques. In spite of a tendency to be long-winded, the book is stimulating. In its main theme it shows the influence of J. M. Sailer, a German Catholic Bishop, whose spiritual writings had much influence on early nineteenth-century Catholic thought.

It is the task of the priest to be a second Christ and all his works and actions must be conformed to those of the great High Priest, whose priesthood he shares. It is this that makes him a man apart, resented by the world; it is this that makes him a 'father' married to his parish or diocese, one who is a father in the Spirit. To sustain his ideal and the demand God lays on him, the priest must cultivate humility and charity—too many hate the world in a sterile way or fall victims to the typical clerical vices of uncharitable gossip or trivial tyranny.

The treatment of the topics of friendship and study is traditional and sound and may prove helpful to many.

IAN HISLOP, O.P.

SANCTA SANCTORUM. By Dr W. E. Orchard. (Dent; 12s. 6d.)

Nearly forty years ago Dr Orchard wrote a book of prayers called *The Temple* when he was a Congregationalist minister. *Sancta Sanctorum* is a sequel to this earlier work, a collection of fifteen priestly prayers which are deeply reverent and sincere and could only have been written by one of long experience in the interior life. They could be used profitably by religious and layfolk as well as by priests, and they will appeal especially to those who find more individualistic prayers unhelpful; saturated with the words of Holy Scripture, they will help people to pray in the biblical formulas that were formerly the favourite prayers of the Christian people. The author's aim is to help the reader towards 'those rare moments when silence intervenes . . . stillness holds every faculty, communion is occupied in receiving rather than asking, and adoration passes beyond words, images and thoughts'. One may confidently expect that this book will achieve its purpose.

HUGH FARMER, O.S.B.



THE PRIEST AND THE UNCONSCIOUS. By Erwin Ringel, M.D., and Rev. Dr Wenzel Van Lun. (Mercier Press; 6s.)

This little book is the substance of a course of lectures given by the authors—a Catholic psychologist and a priest—on the theme, *The Importance of Depth-Psychology for the Practical Care of Souls*. It owes its publication to the keen and open-minded interest shown by the clergy who attended the lectures.

The authors never lose sight of the basic truth that God wills *all* men to be saved; there is no such thing as a 'hopeless case'. No doubt many cases seem hopeless, but modern psychotherapeutic practice has shown that such people can be helped and often cured. But the task is not one for the psychologist alone, nor for the priest alone; it demands the close co-operation of both.

The spheres of priest and doctor are established, and the role of each discussed. The dangers to which each is exposed, and the mistakes each is liable to make, and *must* avoid, are set out in a clear and orderly manner. We are given a succinct yet admirably lucid account of the three schools of psycho-analysis—the Freudian, the Adlerian, and the Jungian—and a useful estimate is made of the good and bad points of each. There is a candid and reasoned appeal to priests to reconsider their almost innate prejudices against psychotherapeutic treatment. The fears that medical psychology tends to minimize the reality of sin, and sets up as alternative explanations either illness or a purely social and cultural guilt complex, should be dispelled by the humble statement of the claims and limitations of depth-psychology. The purpose of analytic treatment is to help establish a harmonious and integrated personality, which will be the foundation for conscious, free decisions, give rise to creative, personal acts, and support the life of super-nature.

In what is, perhaps, the most fascinating section of the book—the chapter on the *Psychology of Faith*—the authors take up again this important question of an integrated personality as the basis of the life of super-nature. They adequately refute the possible charge of psychologism: while not saying that every loss of faith is caused by a neurosis, they say that it is so more times than we might suspect. And, an important point in the work of instruction, a neurosis is often an effective barrier to the acceptance of the faith by one who has no intellectual difficulties.

The authors recognize that a good priest who has no knowledge of modern psychology may still exercise a healthy and sane influence over others; but they warn him against the all too common extreme of supernaturalism, a habit of mind which ignores the natural forces, gifts and values in human nature. Put simply, the authors' case is this: we must never lose sight of the omnipotence of God and the power of

his grace; but we must not rely *passively* on that power and grace; we must make *active* use of every known means of preparing the path for the operation of grace in the world of nature.

It is not suggested that every priest should devote himself to this specialized branch of study and actively co-operate with a psychologist; but every priest is asked at least to be alive to what medical psychology has to teach about the human personality, so that he may apply himself to his confessional work with greater effect. The priest is often the first to have an opportunity of recognizing a disorder which frequently manifests itself for the first time in the confessional. He ought to be able to sense when a patient is ill and needs, in the first place, a cure on the natural level; and such people must be given to understand that *they are ill*, and that it is because of their illness that 'confession doesn't work'. Again, the task of spiritual rehabilitation, which is the priest's special work, requires great tact and a delicate psychological insight if the work of the doctor is not to be undone and the patient thrown back into a worse state than before. The authors have cases on record which confirm the claim that 'priests often increase the difficulties . . . by talking as if from the pulpit; they teach objective truth and pay no attention to the subjective situation of the individual'.

This book is not a piece of quackery. It is a sane and balanced study by men of the highest competency in their own particular line. One may not agree with all they say—for instance, that a neurotic is obliged under pain of sin to seek a cure—but at least one is stimulated and forced to face up to a number of important problems. More could have been said on the danger of breaking the seal of confession in the work of co-operation of priest and psychologist. The case histories presented are of great practical help in seeing the principles. And finally, a word of praise is due the translator for an excellent rendering of the German.

MURDOCH SCOTT, O.P.

THE DIVINE MASTERPIECE. By Gabriel M. Roschini, O.S.M. (The Mercier Press; 7s. 6d.)

THE MOTHER OF GOD. By M. M. Philipon, O.P. (The Mercier Press; 7s. 6d.)

The Mercier Press offers us two studies on our Lady by eminent theologians. The theme of each book is the same: Mary's mission as the Mother of God, and her role as Mediatrix of all graces. Inevitably, then, they have much in common; yet neither is a mere repetition of the other. Father Philipon gives more space to the doctrine of the divine motherhood and regretfully omits all consideration of the virtues and the gifts especially as related to our Lady. This, however, is a notion developed at some length by Father Roschini, and so each book complements the other. But there is a marked contrast of style.

*The Divine Masterpiece* is a scholastic exercise; parts, chapters, and sections are laid out with logical precision, and the theological doctrines presented and developed in strict form. This is the weakness of the book: it is dull, and, in spite of the syllogisms, unconvincing. Father Philipon is more haphazard in his presentation of the theme, but he succeeds in bringing to his work a warmth and lively conviction which is absent from that of Father Roschini. Father Philipon helped himself very much by collecting all *theological notes* in a last chapter.

MURDOCH SCOTT, O.P.



## NOTICES

THE EVERYDAY CATHOLIC. By Martin Harrison, O.P. (Blackfriars Publications; 18s. 6d.)

'The reader will look in vain for a scholarly treatise.' So the preface tells us, but I wonder if this is quite true? Is not experience perhaps a better school than any? This book is the fruit of years of experience with souls. Why should truth be of necessity expressed in language that misses ninety per cent of the population? To whom did our Lord preach if not to the multitudes? Were not all his examples taken from everyday life? Is it unscholarly to be simple? This is a splendid book full of common sense. This is the third edition, and may it have many more. 'I give thee praise that thou hast hidden all this from the wise and the prudent, and revealed it to little children.' (Matt. 11, 25.)

AS THE EAGLE. By A Carmelite Pilgrim. (P. J. Kenedy & Sons; \$3.50.)

There can be little doubt that Mother Butler was one of the great modern women. This book gives an excellent idea of her teaching and spirit from her own words. It is always interesting to know that such people have lived in our own times and that sanctity is not a thing of the past impossible of attainment in our own day.

FREQUENT CONFESSION. By P. H. C. Chèry, O.P. (Blackfriars; 2s.)

A very handy and wise little guide. It might well be digested by many who confess frequently and regularly to prevent them from getting into a rut.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE APOSTOLATE. By Mgr. L. J. Suenens. (The Mercier Press; 7s. 6d.)

This small book is a work about the aims of the Legion of Mary. The author, at present Auxiliary Bishop of Malines, is the Belgian national promoter of the Legion. His book will prove helpful to the Legionary and useful to those who want to know something about its ideals.



ST FRANCIS DE SALES IN HIS LETTERS. Edited by the Sisters of the Visitation. (Sands; 9s. 6d.)

This is a revised edition of a valuable little book that appeared in 1933. The extracts from the letters are full of the kindly wisdom of the saint and many will be glad to find Dom Cuthbert Butler's excellent Introduction which places the letters in the wider context of the theology of the mystical life.



## EXTRACTS

### Rapid growth of the *Petits Frères* and *Petites Soeurs de Jésus*

THE latest issue of the *Bulletin Fraternité Charles de Foucauld* contains some interesting notes on the quite phenomenal growth of these two Congregations in the past eighteen months. The *Petits Frères* have opened more fraternities in France. They continue their quiet apostolate in Morocco and Algeria, and have now penetrated into the heart of the French province of Cameroon. Another foundation has been made at Beni, in Belgian Congo. In South America fraternities have been formed at Santiago and Talca in Chile; another in Brazil, and yet another at Aréquipa in Peru. The Little Brothers have established themselves in the Far East, with a house in Vietnam, and another in Baluchistan, the north-west province of Pakistan. We read that last autumn there were thirty-eight novices testing their vocations at El-Abiodh in Algeria, and that they were made up of ten nationalities. More accommodation had to be found for the ever increasing number of Brothers who study theology under the Dominicans at Saint-Maximin in Provence. One of the most interesting developments is the provision of hermitages on the Ile Saint-Gildas (Côtes-du-Nord), for Brothers who wish to lead the solitary life in emulation of Charles de Foucauld, either for a short or longer period. The maritime fraternity at Concarneau still has several Brothers who earn their living as deck-hands in deep-sea trawlers. At Mar Audicho in Iraq there are a few Brothers living in the midst of Moslem natives, working with them in the fields and among their flocks of sheep.

As to the Little Sisters, it is almost impossible to keep pace with their new foundations, which include fraternities in North and Central Africa, North and South America, Central Asia, the Far East, and all over Europe. They have become so numerous that each regional group

has been placed under the direction of a 'Conseillère', responsible to the Superior-General. A new African novitiate and a fraternity of adoration has been opened at Fez in Morocco. The Little Sisters have penetrated into Uganda, and also into Kenya—right into the Mau Mau country. Eight bishops in the United States have invited the Mother-General to make foundations in their dioceses, but they are held up owing to immigration laws. There has been more success among the Eskimos in Alaska, where three bases are in use by the 'mobile team' of Sisters. A novitiate has been established near Aréquipa in Peru. Another novitiate has been opened at Benares in India, in which there is no colour bar. Back to Europe—here new fraternities have been founded at Copenhagen (Denmark), Helsinki (Finland), Wiener-Neustadt (Russian zone of Austria), and Milan (Italy). A few months ago an Armenian fraternity was opened at Beyrouth. Before long it is hoped to start Chaldean, Maronite and Syrian Sisterhoods. Two fraternities are flourishing in Japan; the one at Tokyo, the other at Yokohama. Several Japanese girls have entered the novitiate. More than a hundred Little Sisters are to assemble at El-Abiodh for a chapter-general this winter, at the close of which it is expected that the following foundations will be made: Kerbubu (French West Africa), Le Cap (North Africa), novitiate among the Indians at Anyanga (Brazil), and a fraternity among the Cayapos Indians (Colombia). Other groups of Little Sisters are waiting orders to leave for Ceylon, Korea, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. Last year thirty Sisters were professed, and all the novitiates appear to be full. An English translation of Père Voillaume's treatise on the spirituality of the disciples of Charles de Foucauld (*Au Coeur des Masses*) is to be published shortly by Burns, Oates and Washbourne, entitled *Seeds of the Desert*. Spanish, German, Portuguese, and Dutch editions are in preparation.

*Jésus-Caritas* (the Bulletin Fraternité Charles de Foucauld) is published every quarter at 'La Source', Dampierre, Seine-et Oise. It is indispensable for those who wish to keep in touch with what is probably the most rapid growth of any religious institute since the foundation of the Friars Minor in the thirteenth century.

The fraternities mentioned in the above list are fairly recent foundations. There are many other groups of the Petits Frères and Petites Soeurs de Jésus scattered around the world, including the fraternity of the Sisters at Pratt's Walk House, Pratt's Walk, Lambeth, S.E.1. Further foundations in Britain are held up meantime because of the insufficient number of British subjects, and consequently the difficulty of obtaining labour permits for aliens.

P.F.A.